

Checking for Validity—Analysis

Civil War Museum Exhibit

Check for alignment: Does the task enable inference about the goals?

Established Goals:

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Virginia SOL History Standard 5.7:
The student will understand the causes and effects of the Civil War with emphasis on slavery, states' rights, leadership, settlement of the West, secession, military events.

Understandings:

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Students will understand the causes and effects of the Civil War.
Students will demonstrate knowledge of topographical maps.

Performance Task:

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You are opening a new museum on the Civil War designed to inform and engage young people. Your task is to select a decisive Civil War battle, research the battle, and construct a diorama of the battle. Attach an index card to your diorama containing the date of the battle, the names of the opposing generals, the number of casualties on each side, and the victor. Finally, create a topographical map to show an aerial view of the battlefield.

Student Products and Performances:

Diorama of Civil War battle

Topographical map of battlefield

Criteria:

- Key Civil War battle depicted
- Accurate information on index card
- Neat and colorful
- Correct spelling
- Accurate topography
- Drawn to scale
- Includes compass rose
- Correct placement of armies
- Neat and colorful

Could the task be performed well without understanding?

☐ yes

☐ no

Could the task be performed poorly in spite of understanding?

☐ yes

☐ no

COMMENTS

The standard requires evidence that shows analysis of and justification for a number of key events and how those events are connected causally.

While engaging and related to the topic, the task does not allow valid inferences to be made about the standard; for example, the student could do well on the diorama without demonstrating an understanding of cause-and-effect. Furthermore, with a focus on a single battle, it is unlikely that even the best diorama would yield insight into the war's cause and effect. Finally, the focus on a single task involving small-motor and aesthetic skills is problematic: students may do poorly or well at the task (i.e., constructing the diorama) for reasons having little to do with their content understanding or lack of it.

Even if the task were adequate for making inferences about the standard, the criteria used to judge the diorama product are somewhat inappropriate. The emphasis here is on accuracy and neatness, with no explicit link in the scoring back to the desired understanding (cause-and-effect reasoning). A more appropriate criterion might involve "sophistication of analysis of battle and its impact" tied to a task about the battle's importance (e.g., having the student write and produce the audiotape for patrons as they walk in a museum about the war).